Politics of Daily Life: Process, Networks, Spontaneity

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Abstract:

This paper develops the concept of 'politics of daily life' and proposes it as the root of the study of power and democracy. The politics of daily life is the practice of influencing how others act, think, and feel on a daily basis. It exposes the process of politics that causes divergent political behaviors, the informal networks that underlie formal political institutions, and the spontaneity of decision-making that shifts institutional pathways. Contextualizing politics in the context of daily life better reflects the realities that shape public opinion, institutional development, and political behavior—central concepts in the political science discipline. The paper provides evidence from three ethnographic case studies in Ghana: the process of voter registration and low-level electoral violence, the informal networks in a politician's private office, and a fire outbreak in an informal settlement.

Keywords:

Daily life, networks, political mobilization, spontaneity, ethnography, institutions

Introduction

This paper develops the concept of 'politics of daily life' and proposes it as the root of the study of power and democracy. The politics of daily life exposes the process of politics that cause divergent political behaviors, the informal networks that underlie formal political institutions, and the spontaneity of decision-making that shifts institutional pathways. It is particularly important in developing countries, where formal institutions are often weak and unable to explain the full scope of the political world. Contextualizing politics in the context of daily life better reflects the realities that shape public opinion, institutional development, and political behavior—central concepts in the political science discipline.

Daily life shapes political behavior, institutional development, and public opinion. In this paper, I present evidence from Accra, Ghana, derived from ethnographic field research, to show how power is exercised in practice. The paper proposes that political scientists incorporate consistent and systematic investigations of daily life into their research designs (Schaffer 1999). It suggests that more explicit attention to political science concepts like institutions, political behavior, and public opinion can contribute to theories of daily life that are prevalent in other disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies.

The Politics of Daily Life

Theories of daily life examine what people and groups think, do and feel in the context of the everyday. They try to explain the meaning and organization of experience (Goffman 1974). Examining human activity in peoples' daily lives is important because society does not exist separate from these practices. Lefebvre (1947) influentially described daily life as the site where the production of human activity takes place. Or, as De Certeau (1984) calls it, that which is repetitive and unconscious. But political scientists have mostly abandoned the site of daily life to focus on other things, such as periodic events like elections and voting, irregular political activity like protests and coups, and formal and official activity like Congress and presidential power. Yet my analysis demonstrates how formal politics can be more thoroughly explained by treating daily life as a study site.

Two bodies of scholarship dominate theories of the everyday: structural theories that emphasize the mode of production and structures of power (De Certeau 1984; Bourdieu 1977) and agency theories that focus on the human body and its relation to the world (Lock and

Farquhar 2007). While these theories are not mutually exclusive, they emphasize different aspects of daily life.

Structural theories, pioneered by De Certeau, emphasize a distinction between those in power, or those who employ strategies, and ordinary people who navigate the street within these power structures, or those who use tactics. These structures of power are historically rooted and lived through by ordinary individuals (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). The modes of production are influenced by powerful actors, including those in the international system, and structure the possibilities for people in their daily lives. Ordinary people navigate their reality through the signs and symbols available to them (Geertz 1973), and this symbolic world is often not of their own choosing. James Scott correctly asserts that at the center of daily life is hierarchy and domination—politics that occur in what he calls the public and hidden transcripts (1985, 1990). Similarly, Del Negro and Berger (2004: 4) argue that "everyday life is best understood as an interpretive framework defined in dialectical opposition to the notion of special events," emphasizing separate realms for ordinary people and those in power. In sum, structural theories of daily life tend to pit the informal versus the formal; and similarly, the ordinary versus the elite.

Agency theories focus on the ways that individuals make sense of their world. They emphasize the body, affects, emotions, and psychology to better understand what makes individuals tick. They attempt to explain why people do what they do at exact points in time. Kathleen Stewart (2007: 9) provocatively shows how daily life is hard work: "Everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided. It takes everything we have." Stewart seeks to uncover those moments she calls ordinary affects, which "gives things the quality of *some*thing to inhabit and animate" (Ibid: 15). Similarly, Lauren Berlant points to the different states in life that lead to particular unfolding of events. She argues that her book "*Cruel Optimism* turns toward thinking about the ordinary as an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on" (2011: 8). Agency theories treat daily life as a schema where actors make conscious (or unconscious) decisions that might have serious consequences in the future. While structural theories emphasize *habitus*, structurally organized practice, and the process of routinization, agency theories uncover individuals' decision-making, motivations, and experience that enforce or break the daily status quo.

This paper argues for an approach that incorporates institutional analysis into the study of daily life. In doing so, the patterns, habits, and discourses of daily life are not examined separately from personal agency. Instead, I show how theories of daily life can be bolstered by paying close attention to concepts that are central to the discipline of political science, including institutions, political behavior, and political decision-making. Agency theories can be enhanced through a direct examination of the daily political dynamics that reinforce and destabilize the status quo. In other words, treating daily life as a site for empirical observation demonstrates how politics works and unfolds as a process. Neat informal/formal and ordinary/elite dichotomies that are central to structural theories break down.

Similarly, agency theories are complemented with rich knowledge about political factors—institutions, behaviors, and opinions—that might shift and restructure the pathways of daily life. This is similar to what Michael Hanchard (2006) calls political coagulation, or when a diverse set of actors are linked through episodic circumstances in the context of the quotidian. But what sets this focus on the politics of daily life apart from previous examinations is that it sheds light on how elites and ordinary people interact, how elites act in "ordinary ways," "formal" politicians act informally, and institutions are crafted and re-crafted to maintain the status quo. Contrary to the incremental change that Hanchard and Scott seem to suggest, elites and ordinary people might be merely "living through" their institutional environment, employing conscious skills to keep the status quo in place—or, making institutions work for them (Berk and Galvan 2009). But they might also subvert decision-making processes, shifting institutions in ways that benefit themselves.

I define the politics of daily life as *the practice of influencing how others act, think, and feel on a daily basis*. First, it is embedded in the *social practices* of individuals. But what separates my concept from others is that the study of these social practices should include formal political actors like presidents, politicians, technocrats, and business elites, as well as ordinary people. An emphasis on social practices blurs these crude lines between formal political behavior and informal activity, or action that occurs outside of officially sanctioned rules and regulations. The observable implications of these social practices are the actions, events, customs, and behaviors of people involved in a study.

Second, *power* shapes what happens in daily life. The concept of politics of daily life is most concerned with the first dimension of power, i.e. the ability of individuals, organizations, or

institutions to influence decision-making (Lukes 1974). Power is also about relationships, and uncovering these ties between people helps explain how power is structured. The observable implications of these political relationships are the networks that form from social interactions that occur over time, as well as the social ties between people.

Third, the politics of daily life extends beyond the first face of power to include the structures of authority that might not be measurable or observable, but are nonetheless shaping peoples' behavior. I suggest that political scientists' focus on *institutions*, or the rules and norms that govern societies, is an important addition to everyday life theory. The politics of daily life examines how political institutions work each day, because this is where elites and ordinary people interact as well as where prospects for stability and change occur. This is because people contribute to the constructing and disfiguring of institutions through the process of creative syncretism (Berk and Galvan 2009). Important institutions that require analysis include elections, legislatures, administrative bodies, property rights regimes, and customary authority. The observable implications of these political institutions are the rules and norms themselves, as well as the strength, functionality, and utility of them from day to day—what they make people do.

Fourth, the concept of politics of daily life requires uncovering the *emotions* that people feel on a daily basis, more specifically, the emotions linked to the social practices, power dynamics, and institutions that govern behavior. This is because emotions motivate people to act, think, and feel in a certain way. These emotions have political consequences. They might include "public opinion" and "political attitudes," but they might not be clearly specified as such. For example, the way a politician makes a citizen feel might tell us more about his or her likelihood to participate in multi-party politics than whether he or she "supports democracy." Alternatively, how a resident feels a particular day might motivate him or her to engage in collective action. While there are other ways to study emotions, like using surveys or experiments, the politics of daily life requires a focus on how individuals make sense of their daily environment through a process of meaning-making (Wedeen 2002). This approach also underlies a theory of political change, because it can uncover when, where, and how emotions shift and behaviors change. The observable implications of these emotions are the feelings that research subjects have that propel them to act or acquiesce.

Finally, the politics of daily life occurs in *real time*. Real time refers to events that are depicted at the same rate at which research subjects experience them. But it is important to

record this activity in a consistent manner allowing for process tracing and comparative analysis. The most straightforward way to record real time activity is to document events, behavior, and actions in chronological order. Documenting real time data shows the process by which events occur, as well as exogenous shocks and critical junctures that shift political decision-making. The observable implications of real time analysis are the date and time during which political events and political behavior occurs.

Political ethnography, or "immersion in the lives of the people under study" (Wedeen 2010; Schatz 2009), is necessary to examine the politics of daily life. An ethnographer's critical theoretical practice, quotidian ethics, and improvisational tendencies allow her to act like a jazz musician—researching in real time but building off a tradition and situated knowledge (Malkki 2007). The researcher must be present on a daily basis, in the site where decisions are made, people participate and deliberate, and struggles over resources occur. This demonstrates the limiting and enabling effects of daily life itself. But it also shows how people are linked through episodic circumstances (Hanchard 2006), how ordinary people understand sovereignty through practices of everyday state building (Chalfin 2010), and how democracy and political order can be arrived at spontaneously (diZerega 1989, Scott 2012). In essence, people "live through" their institutions by viewing them as bundles of resources available for creative reinterpretation and recombination (Berk and Galvan 2009).

Political ethnographies that treat daily life as a site of inquiry include Pachirat's (20000) analysis of the "politics of sight" in an American slaughterhouse, Wedeen's (2007) examination of public spheres in daily Yemeni life, Walsh's (2004) informal conversations with Americans at a local gas station, and Smith's (2015) exploration of vigilante justice in South Africa. These studies are notable for their systematic, non-arbitrary, and sustained data collection of daily life. Ethnography allows the researcher to "hear" what might not be heard in formal outlets, and "see" what might be invisible using other research techniques (Schatzberg 2008). This paper draws from these important studies, but challenges the neat distinction between the realm of "daily life" and the sphere of "formal politics."[1] My analysis demonstrates how formal political sites such as the offices of politicians are shaped by the quotidian, and vice versa. This is similar to Parkinson's (2013) account of formal and informal organizing of rebellion in Lebanon.

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[1] I thank an anonymous reviewer for this thoughtful insight.

I turn now to three ethnographic case studies that examine the politics of daily life in urban Ghana. The cases draw from 15 months of field research, and are part of a larger research project on political accountability in urban Africa (Paller 2014b). The cases illuminate the process of politics that structure diverse political behaviors, the informal networks that underlie formal institutions, and the spontaneity in decision-making that shapes institutional pathways.

Process and political behavior

One of the goals of political science is to explain political behavior. Scholars do this by emphasizing the interests and preferences of political actors. Yet models of political behavior constrain these interactions to formal institutional environments, suggesting that relationships between citizens and representatives are restricted to electoral politics and official bargaining (for a good critique of this, see Auyero 2001). The interactions between these political actors are typically bounded in time, focusing either on an election, war, or event.

Yet political decision-making, including electoral politics, is a long process that occurs in the context of daily life. In this case study, I show how a close examination of the politics of daily life exposes the process of low-level electoral violence, which can be traced back to the registration period several months before the elections. This helps explain why tensions escalated in certain communities, but in the end, violence did not break out during the elections despite underlying structural conditions.

Ghana has had multi-party elections since 1992 and is hailed as the model democracy on the African continent. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the National Patriotic Party (NPP) dominate the political arena. Today, the NDC is the governing party (2008-Present), while the opposition NPP ruled previously (2000-2008). The electoral environment is extremely competitive, and voter registration is a crucial part of winning elections. Much of the controversy and anger surrounding elections can be traced back to the registration process. Candidates use different strategies to gain advantages and run into problems of disqualification that might stick with them for several years. The exercises provide opportunities for institutional innovation, persistence, and change. In young democracies without much experience with elections, registration exercises offer a trial run or preliminary heat for the real thing—without international observers looking on. In sum, registration exercises offer Ghanaians an opportunity to experience politics, have their voices heard, and interact with their politicians.

The registration exercise began eight months before the December 2012 elections. It offered one of the first chances to see the strength of the organizational apparatuses of each candidate, and their ability to mobilize supporters. Tensions between the two major political parties in the neighborhood emerged early, as *Joy News* reports:

> Dozens injured in clashes between NDC, NPP supporters at Odododiodio. A scuffle between some supporters of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the Odododiodio constituency last night left several people injured. The scuffle ensued when a meeting called by NPP activists in the constituency was interrupted by some youth from the NDC.[2]

This altercation set the stage for the tension during the registration exercise. A week before, a confrontation between parties took place outside the NDC candidate's house. The NDC supporters were honest about their role in the altercation: "Some of the other side was having a meeting just outside our PC's house. It was very disrespectful. So our guys had to go chase them away." But the confrontation became a political problem, as an opposition NPP party leader said, "They are now preventing our people from registering."

By paying close attention to the role of emotions, the politics of daily life demonstrates how feeling disrespected encouraged the resident to join his friends and get involved in the skirmishes. Politicians then mobilized around these feelings of disrespect for political purposes. These feelings are especially strong among the youth, as they constantly framed their grievances in terms of injustices. One young man explained that he did not think it was fair that the NPP was bussing people in to register in their constituency. This feeling of injustice encouraged him to get involved and make sure that he and his friends don't let "outsiders" register.

Observing the registration exercise on a consistent, daily basis shows how the entire process is strategic and well-organized, but also susceptible to daily emotional changes. Registering voters had a very important logic that all members of the campaign understood. The campaign team developed an insider-outsider narrative that stressed the indigeneity of the Ga ethnic group—the majority of whom supported the NDC.[3] This narrative of "indigeneity" is based on a long history of settlement and belonging, which shapes access to housing and security

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[2] Odododiodio is an electoral constituency in central Accra. It is a highly competitive constituency.
[3] The Ga people are an ethnic group whose ancestral homeland is Accra.

of tenure (Paller 2015). These informal rules and norms directly translate into political strategies, as the youth claimed that they "know who live in their houses" and that if an outsider "who they do not know" tried to register, they would formally "challenge" the registrant so as to intimidate the potential voters from voting in the constituency.

Daily accounts of the registration exercise exposed how people formed opinions, and changed their attitudes about their political preferences. One afternoon, a man explained the political climate of the area. "Things are changing a bit here," he said. "People are starting to turn NPP." He said that the bikers and the footballers are starting to support the NPP in greater numbers. People were upset that the NDC had not contributed to developing the area. Two days later, a young man expressed his political preference for the NDC candidate "since he supported the boxers." These informal interest groups like bikers and footballers are important because they command great mobilization power, and they can create a lot of noise. The politics of daily life exposed the important interest groups on the ground, especially groups that are often overlooked in public opinion polls, like bikers and footballers. These mobilization strategies are embedded in the social practices of the constituents: sport, music, religion, and customs are politicized.[4]

Speaking to residents on a daily basis exposed how important interest groups form their preferences and decide on candidates. In this case, the incumbent NDC took a defensive approach by trying to maintain the demographic status quo. The politics of daily life shows how powerful actors aligned their strategies with the emotions of its followers. For example, one young man constantly talked about how "we [the NDC] cannot let them [the NPP] in." He mentioned how the NDC has never lost a polling station in Ussher Town—the heart of Ga land in central Accra. When walking by the post office, he said: "This is ours. We oversee this land." When he discussed NPP-NDC, he stressed the importance of "keeping them out." He did not talk about winning over swing voters, but of "standing ground." He provided a narrative of territoriality, and the NDC signaled this by posting banners at every neighborhood entrance.

The boundaries between ethnic group and political party blurred when discussing politics with residents. The NPP is regarded as an Akan-based party.[5] The NDC tried to prevent Akans from voting in the constituency, fearing that the NPP would gain political power locally. But politicians also tried to physically mark their territory—creating a political space of their own—

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[4] Other important interest groups include fishermen, scrap dealers, and market women.
[5] The Akan people make up the largest ethnic group in West Africa.

by placing large banners and posters everywhere. These posters became a central part of people's daily life during the electoral process.

With limited resources at their disposal, the NDC sent their foot soldiers to "quell registration" in areas dominated by ethnic outsiders (mostly Akans): the railways and marketplaces. The NPP executives reported these confrontations, calling them "daily clashes." The NDC Parliamentary candidate allegedly sent his "macho men" to polling stations to "tell people not to register."[6] One polling station was shut down. In response, the NPP encouraged people to register, telling supporters that as a party organization, they would take care of the challenges.[7] The dispute between the two parties intensified, and was the talk of the town. Radio stations discussed the issue. The NDC "challenged" anyone who spoke the Twi language, regardless of his or her party affiliation.[8]

By examining the registration process in the context of daily life, the escalation of low-level violence on day seven of the registration exercise was not surprising. Although it took a full week, the tension had mounted prior to the exercise—the moment the NDC youth felt "disrespected" at their organizational meeting. Despite the problems in the community, and even within the NDC itself, Ghanaian residents claimed that they were unified. They constantly explained how they "are one." The political parties met at the same time on Wednesday evenings. After the meetings those in attendance joined each other again: sitting outside their homes, having drinks, and watching their children play together. They even went to "outdoorings" together, an important social practice that symbolized coming together.[9] The spaces of engagement were deep, and even with the tension during electoral campaigns there was an underlying context of daily bonding that promotes peaceful coexistence (Varshney 2002). These spaces of social engagement directly translated into the political process: the local leaders of the party built on this unity, and planned a meeting to settle the problems.

But the stakes were extremely high during the registration exercise, and this led to tensions that contributed to violent activity. Two weeks into the registration exercise these tensions escalated, as *Myjoyonline News* reports: "The New Patriotic Party is incensed at what it

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[6] Politicians in Ghana use strong young men called "macho men" as bodyguards, as well as to intimidate voters.
[7] A challenge is a legal strategy that political parties use to question the legitimacy of a registrant. After a challenge, the electoral commission has to verify the registrants' identity and residency requirements.
[8] Twi is the indigenous language of a set of Akan people, and is the most popular language spoken in Ghana.
[9] An outdooring is a gathering to celebrate a birthday, wedding, funeral, or any other celebration. They take place outside of a house or in the street.

says is an act of thuggery being perpetrated by the aspiring Member of Parliament. The party has thus issued a 24-hour ultimatum for the acts of violence and thuggery to stop or they will take steps to protect their members." It is extremely difficult to trust the media reports in Ghana. Not only are the media stations politically polarized, but they also report the news directly, without doing any significant investigatory work. Therefore, the news reports are objective, but they might only report exactly what the political parties tell them. This means that media reports, taken alone, are a problematic data source for researchers. Instead, the politics of daily life helps contextualize the media reporting to understand what is really happening on the ground.

A few days later, the political parties were in disaster management mode. A popular female NPP politician came to the neighborhood and was allegedly attacked by a group of "macho men" from the NDC. In the evening, she took to the airwaves. A political drama between leaders of the NPP and NDC followed, in which both sides accused the other of violence, fraud, and undermining the democratic process. None of this was surprising to residents: it was part of the rules of the political game in Ghana, and they had seen it all before. But the tension escalated over the course of several days, scaring residents and activists of both parties. For example, the NDC office administrative secretary said that the streets were volatile, and she was not happy with the violence. She even said that she was "scared for her life." She was less scared of the local boys than the NPP national members. "They did not need to bring her in," she angrily said, referring to the visiting politician. "We will not let that happen again this time. We have to stand our ground. We have to fight back. This time we are armed—we will not let them bully us."

The secretary is a very religious woman, and she gained recognition in the community through her Sunday gospel singing at church. But at this moment, she spoke the same narrative that young foot soldiers and the politicians used: that "they" were causing the violence and it was time to "stand our ground," emphasizing how "we are armed." Peoples' sense of security had changed: the level of fear had risen and their community had become a battleground. Here, her emotions changed and contributed to her political behavior because of the process of events that occurred in daily life. Her demographic characteristics—her education, faith, political party affiliation, and ethnicity—were of secondary importance to the actions of the previous days.

After the alleged attack against the politician, the NPP held a press conference to garner support. In reality, the NPP was using the situation as a campaign event, turning the violence into

an opportunity to win votes. A national figure in the NPP began the press conference as follows: "We don't want to get to the point where we perpetrate violence against women. We have to stop this. Nobody tolerates women being hit." He touched on a powerful historical narrative, and linked the attack to an event that happened in the 1980s where women traders were beaten at Makola Market, a prominent marketplace in central Accra. For NPP members this marks a dark time in Ghana's history under the dictatorship of former head of state Jerry John Rawlings. He then pointed to the NPP men sitting in the front, who were attacked by the NDC. He referred to them as "Those gentlemen with broken heads," whose apparent injuries stemmed from violence by the NDC "macho men."

The NPP strategically made the violence into a gender issue to mobilize women voters. One prominent politician recapped an "all-out attack" complete with knife and broken bottles. "This is a serious blow to womanhood," he said. He described how the NDC candidate declared this a "no-go area from those he perceives as physical opponents." He then made a strong point about the Ga people, emphasizing that Gas are not only affiliated with the NDC: "He [The NDC politician] is representing his own interests and not the interests of the Ga people—I say so as a proud Ga. Gas love to live with all and sundry, we say *Ablekuma Ablekuma wo* – meaning we want to welcome strangers so as to make progress together. The NPP belongs to all tribes."

The leaders of the NPP told their side of the story, highlighting how their politician was attacked while police officers watched. Meanwhile, journalists heard a different story from the NDC the previous day. Eyewitnesses told one reporter that the NPP politician was wearing party paraphernalia and entered the polling station, which is not allowed by Ghanaian election law. Some NDC polling agents tried to prevent her from entering and an NPP man smacked the man. A tussle ensued. Nonetheless, uncovering the truth was extremely difficult. Everything was immediately politicized and the facts were unknown.

Regardless of exactly what happened, the important consequence of the event was the emotions that it sparked on the ground. The NPP foot soldiers were particularly angry, suggesting that they would take the matters into their own hands. They would retaliate because they did not think their party leaders were acting fast enough: they are "too level-headed and slow." After the press conference, a large crowd of people marched through the streets to the railways, and then toward a polling station. The procession stopped and everyone started singing "We shall overcome." They sang the song because they claimed the march represented

freedom—the freedom to register. About ten minutes later, one politician stated, "We cannot let people be disenfranchised. Everybody has the right to vote where they want."

At the local NPP office in the neighborhood, a group of women sought refuge because they said "300 men" with broken bottles and machetes had come to attack them and vandalize their homes. NDC insiders told a different story, suggesting that a group of NPP "thugs" were causing problems near the railways. Because of this, the NDC called on their own boys to fight them and stand their ground. The action was taking place on the streets, where the rumors spread. It was unclear what actual violence occurred, but the level of fear was high. While tension was high for several days, the leaders took it upon themselves to settle their dispute and meet for a "Peacemaking Ceremony." The politicians met on the beach and agreed to settle their differences. But this happened informally, without the formal guidance from the Electoral Commission, Police, or Judges. With strong social ties and networks established, leaders from both political parties came together to find a solution to the low-level conflict.

An executive member of the NDC confirmed: "The Electoral Commission has done its best, but they are not fully in control of the process." He made an analogy to football, and said that the EC is like FIFA, soccer's international governing body. But the party executives were able to maintain peace because "the leadership is so free and so close to each other." In other words, the constituency executives are very close, cordial and work together on a daily basis. In essence, the context of daily life stayed the same: NPP and NDC members continued to eat, drink, and trade with one another. Party executive members continued to talk to each other on their cell phones, and walk the two blocks to each other's offices to settle disputes. Nonetheless, the registration process set the daily context for the upcoming December elections.

This site had all the conditions that political scientists prescribe as ripe for civil conflict and electoral violence: political competition, ethnic heterogeneity, poverty, and unemployment. Rumors spread fast, which have also been shown to contribute to the escalation of violence (Oborn 2008). Each of these conditions played a role in the story. But analyzed independently, outside of the context of daily life, the conventional variables are unable to explain the political behavior witnessed in this case study.

Instead, the politics of daily life exposed the process of escalation and de-escalation of violence. On the one hand, the emotions of disrespect motivated foot soldiers to defend themselves, and allegedly instigate violence. These events occurred in real time, and must be

verified as such. On the other hand, the social practices of community leaders—eating, attending "outdoorings," praying together—provided the context for a peaceful settlement. Additionally, these social ties between community leaders exposed that many were part of the same political network, providing further evidence for why violence did not escalate further.

Networks and political parties

Informal networks underlie formal political alliances and institutions. While actors and institutions have their formal roles and duties, it is the informal friendships and pacts that often shape political behavior in daily life (Paller 2014). This is particularly the case with respect to political parties in urban Ghana. In the following section, I use ethnographic data collected at the private office of Parliamentary candidate Nii Lantey Vanderpuye to demonstrate how informal linkages between traditional authorities, family members, politicians, pastors and businesspeople form for private and political profit, often at the expense of the public good. The politics of daily life demonstrates the roots of power beyond formal positions and categories.

Finding political spaces where the formal and informal interact requires consistency, daily visits, and patience. One such space is the private office of politicians. Political party and politicians' offices are spaces where followers and supporters come together to deliberate about politics and discuss important issues. But they also are spaces of entertainment, filled with TVs and couches for supporters to spend many hours. While they are club spaces, they signal to the public how open the candidate is to meeting with supporters and the brand the politician wants to project to constituents.

Nii Lantey Vanderpuye's large social network brings him considerable political power in his electoral constituency. Being part of his informal network brings people patronage goods and state resources: individuals might gain jobs and get their school fees paid. As one person explained, "Everybody in Vanderpuye's office is taken care of. They wear nice clothes." Officially, individuals and groups had formal names and designations; yet the true source of their power was made apparent during daily interactions at the office. The people who hang out and visit the office are nodes in his informal network, with varying degrees of power and influence.

Important information about the political support of candidates, politicians' mobilization strategies, mechanisms of accountability, and campaign strategies were all on display at the politician's office. Foot soldiers planned rallies, and engaged the media. For example, one day

the campaign team had to send photos from a rally to the press. It was good for the campaign to send the photos because the media did not send a photographer. Furthermore, the campaign had to pay the media to attend the event. Campaigns must pay for publicity. As the previous case study showed, there is undoubtedly a free press in Ghana, but media outlets have their political leanings, and many are publicly known. Politicians must pay for them to cover an event.

A politician's private office serves as an intermediary between the constituents and the politician. Residents and leaders of groups come to the office to seek recognition from the politician and to invite him or her to their events. Politicians, in turn, can use these formal groups as a way to distribute patronage to potential voters. Observing group leaders and members coming in to seek support from Vanderpuye was a daily activity, and figuring out which events made it on his schedule demonstrates how important the local groupings are in his informal network. Politicians are under extreme pressure from potential followers during campaign season because residents see this as an opportunity to gain state or private resources from politicians.

For example, one afternoon a community leader dropped off the following invitation letter that read: "We wish to invite you to the inauguration of our community group...We would be very grateful if you could come and inaugurate our group for us as the entire membership has pledged our support for you." The leader discussed the letter with the administrative secretary. But the secretary did not give the man much time, signaling the low level of importance that the campaign attached to the leader's interest group. Politicians who are successful at mobilizing grassroots support use already-existing social groups as a way to consolidate support. Co-opting these groups is a critical campaign strategy. The next day, the campaign was formalizing the organizational structure of their campaign by forming official groups out of already existing groups, and calling them "Friends for Nii Lantey Vanderpuye."

An important part of the data gathering strategy was to identify the people coming into the office. I relied on my close relationships with the secretaries and other mainstays in the office for assistance. For example, one afternoon important members of the campaign team met in the conference room to shift directions in strategy. The secretary explained to me who was around the table. The room included an influential pastor and opinion leader in the community who was a childhood friend of the candidate. There was also an older woman who was a local branch chair, described as, "When she talks, they listen. She's been in the party for a very long time." Another powerful man was a chair of a local party branch that owns a typing/photocopy

business. He gained status when he secured a large contract to manage toilets, which provided many jobs to area youth, as well as funding for NDC political campaigns.

The most helpful interviews were informal conversations with the chief campaign strategist. He always looked forward to discussing the electoral strategies. He paid close attention to the "bandwagon votes," or those prospective voters who threw their support publicly behind their candidate, but then could be convinced at the last minute to vote for the opponent if they received gifts during the last week of the campaign. "We cannot trust for sure that these voters will go for us. I think it is more likely 5-10 percent but I need to be sure I bump the number up a bit—just to be safe," he explained to me one day. While on the surface these are "swing voters," the bandwagon refers to what happens in the context of daily life during the campaign. Further, paying close attention to daily life uncovers who these voters are. Contrary to political science definitions of swing voters, they are not simply the people who vote for different parties across elections. Instead, they make electoral decisions based on the daily events that unfold during an electoral period.

Significant power is given to Ghana's decentralized, local authorities. The local representatives of the people are assemblymen. They have direct contact with the people and are expected to deal with the provision of public services like water, electricity, sanitation, roads and streetlights. While the assemblymen are supposed to be non-partisan, they are usually supported financially by a politician and are closely aligned to MPs or Parliamentary candidates. Gaining access to the politicians' offices helped uncover which assemblymen are aligned with which politicians. These alliances are crucial to win elections, but also for the representative to carry out his or her job: assemblymen need the support of their superiors satisfy their constituents and to ensure that public goods projects will occur in their area.

Assembly representatives were often in the office. During these times, they told me about their relationship to the candidate. One assemblyman explained how when he was campaigning in 2010 asked the incumbent MP for support. He was denied because the MP had his own candidate that he preferred. When he won, the MP would not collaborate on projects or release funds for local development. But the assemblyman took the blame for failure to develop the neighborhood. The assemblyman explained: "People come to me every day with their problems. School fees, family member in the hospital, funeral. I try to help them when I can. Since the election, my account has been in the red." Meanwhile, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly does

not follow through on their responsibilities. Therefore, the assemblyman goes to Vanderpuye for financial support, and to assist in development projects. He has more money and is closer to those in the top of the governing party. In return, assemblymen are grassroots mobilizers.

Daily interactions exposed the inner circle of the politician's political network. For example, one day Vanderpuye came to the office, shook my hand, and did not smile. His sister and wife then entered. Some people in the waiting room appeared nervous. They wanted something from him, but it was clear that they were not part of his inside crew. Others walked directly into his office without waiting for an invitation. They appeared much more comfortable, cracked jokes, and spoke Ga. It became clear who were insiders in the political and social network, and who were outsiders. Language was central: the Ga language dominated the daily discourse in the office. This had the power to create a core group of ethnically Ga leaders, and to dismiss those who did not speak Ga. There were at the center of the political network.

Researching in the private office provided insights into the candidate's daily schedule. In the evenings, Vanderpuye went to delegates' houses to garner support. On Friday nights he did all night prayer sessions. On Sundays he held "peace marches."[10] On Sunday afternoons he met with Keep-Fit Clubs.[11] On Mondays, he visited different neighborhoods to speak with delegates. He did more house visits the rest of the week. The night before the primary he planned one of the most important events: a dinner for delegates at a nearby bar and restaurant. "We want them to come and have a nice dinner with us, sleep well, and then come in the morning and be with us," the campaign strategist explained. The candidate tried to save as much money as possible for the last night to make sure he did not lose the "bandwagon voters." In this way, Vanderpuye co-opted the social practices of residents, and politicized them. But this also provided him valuable legitimacy, and portrayed him as a man of the people.

Tracing who appeared with Vanderpuye during Sunday prayer services was also telling. The candidate had many spiritual advisers. The head Pastor of the historic Palladium Church "is an NDC man." Another pastor was "always in Van's office." People who worked in the office were perceived as well off: "Nobody in Vanderpuye's office is doing badly," one resident said. Constituents came to the office when they had problems. It was a one-stop shop for those with life problems. Politicians are not necessarily expected to give money outright, but rather to

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[10] Peace marches are gatherings to call for peaceful coexistence, unity, and nonviolent elections.
[11] Keep-fit clubs are youth athletic clubs that form at the grassroots. They are made up of mostly young men.

connect constituents with his or her personal and professional network. This networking was constantly on visible display in the office. For example, one afternoon a group of woman sat in chairs because the candidate secured loans for their businesses. But, of course, not all constituents have access to these networks.

On the ground, leaders guard their relationships with politicians closely. Community leaders do not like to allow other residents into the politicians' networks. Leaders do not share information and might not act as transparent intermediaries to the politician. It is hard to get a scheduled meeting with the candidate because he does not keep to a schedule. "If something comes up, he will just go," an assemblyman said. Identifying who gets a meeting with Vanderpuye signals how strong their social ties are, as well as their power in the relationship. One day, for example, he scheduled a meeting with a delegate, but then quickly got a phone call from the Mayor calling him to the office. He went. This demonstrates the power of the Mayor: Vanderpuye immediately canceled his scheduled meeting and joined the mayor in his office.

Real-time interactions expose the strength of political ties between actors. These observations captured in the politics of daily life help identify sources of power in political relationships, as well as nodes in larger social networks. The research strategy also uncovers the relationship between political power and social practices, showing how politicians use social practices to mobilize followers. But social practices are also used to legitimate politicians. In this way, formal/informal and elite/ordinary categories break down. Officially non-partisan positions like assemblymen are inherently partisan; religious figures provide spiritual and material support to politicians (and vice versa); informal social networks pervade partisan politics; and informal institutions shape political behavior. Politicians' offices are a space for political coagulation in daily life—a site where diverse actors are linked through episodic experiences (Hanchard 2006). In sum, the politics of daily life uncovers how informal networks not only pervade formal political institutions, but also how daily life shapes the behavior of political actors.

Spontaneity and institutional change

Institutions, or the rules and norms that govern human behavior, shape how people act, think, and feel. But people can also change institutions. Documenting daily events exposes where, when, and how people's social practices, emotions, and behavior change institutions. By focusing on real-time events, I am able to show how people respond to events and become agents

of institutional change. More importantly, the process occurs spontaneously in the course of daily life. In this section, I demonstrate how daily crises like fire outbreaks can structure local politics and affect the decision-making pathways. The politics of daily life exposes the spontaneous self-organization of communities that lead to new rules and shifting norms.

In Ghana's informal settlements, humanitarian crises like fire outbreaks are constant reminders of everyday insecurity. Residents' security of tenure is impacted by the constant worry that a fire will break out in their neighborhood. As one resident said, "Throughout the night I wake up whenever I hear a noise because I think it is a fire. It is not a way to live." The government even uses this rhetoric to legitimize their policy to evict residents in the community, suggesting: "It is no place for humans to live." But journalists also use the fire outbreaks to write exceptional stories and portray the community as weak and vulnerable. As one resident explained, "They always do exceptional stories so that they can win awards. They only write if something terrible happens: a fire, violence, etc."

In the informal settlement Old Fadama, the large fire outbreak in 2009 remains an important event in the community's folk memory. Residents remember the event because it marks the date when residents were allowed to start building permanent concrete structures; when the community governing board re-organized to widen the roads and tax its residents; and when leaders received valuable goods from the authorities but hoarded them and only distributed them to their own followers. The event substantiates the claim that the community has corrupt leaders. Meanwhile, politicians politicize fire outbreaks to win votes.

In May 2012, there was a fire outbreak in the settlement. One leader estimated that 1,000 structures and more than 15,000 people were "rendered homeless." He chose this number based on his "knowledge of the community," but it seemed far too large a number. The leader prided himself as an expert on the community where he works. But he does not sleep there, even though he claims to live there when he speaks on behalf of the community members in front of NGOs and to the public media. As a self-proclaimed human rights activist in the community, he knew that he needed to rush to the scene and document the fire. He used his cell phone to call as many leaders in the community as he could: he wanted to make sure that he was noticed for his work and he wanted residents to see him "showing concern."

The fire burned for more than two hours. There was a big open space that was entirely burned to the ground. A water tank was half burned. There was ash everywhere. Girls filled

containers full of soot. Young boys tried to salvage anything they could find. Hundreds of people waited around to see if they could get any help. Journalists began coming in abundance—all the large radio outlets covered the fire. The Ghana Fire Service came to extinguish the fire and their representative provided an interview. But reporters also needed a local who they could trust, and a reporter made a phone call to the community leader to walk him around the neighborhood. The journalist wanted to dramatize a story where only young women head porters lived in the community, and were victims. The reporter sought to craft a narrative of vulnerability and powerlessness among the residents. But some of the most powerful leaders in the community were affected, including at least one who worked for the government.

Residents' immediate reactions that day signaled interesting political opinions. One man panicked, "How are we to vote? It burned our Voter ID cards. They did this to us so that we don't vote." It became more politicized as the recovery process continued. The outbreak occurred during campaign season for the upcoming presidential election but also a very important parliamentary election. Therefore, the fire provided an opportunity for politicians to visit the community. They would use the fire as a campaign event, but also as an excuse to distribute patronage to their followers. For example, a parliamentary candidate visited and promised to bring relief items. Other politicians brought mosquito nets and distributed them to residents. Politicians campaign by "showing concern," handing out mosquito nets, and making lists of potential followers so that they can distribute patronage goods to them later.

Three days later, the spot where the fire occurred was entirely transformed. It was a modern-day construction site. Residents were building rapidly, and they were using cement blocks. The leaders were telling residents that they could not build wooden structures. If residents could not afford cement, they were advised to sell their plot. The fire outbreak demonstrated that the community involved significant amounts of spontaneous self-organization. In other words, the rebuilding process was not led by the formal authorities, but rather by residents themselves. Residents rebuilt their structures within guidelines established by their local leaders: new rules were formed. The fire gave leaders the opportunity to establish rules and regulations for building codes; it gave the better-off residents opportunities to purchase structures and invest in the community; and it gave ordinary residents the opportunity to upgrade their homes. Residents invested in their homes without formal and secure property rights.

Another man had a row of blocks: two rows each. He could not afford any more blocks. But he had to put something down to mark his territory; otherwise other people would build in his place. By marking the territory, the property would be secured. Even without official property title, residents found unique ways to secure their housing plots: they built walls, set down stones, and aligned with their tribal leaders. They upgraded their slum properties themselves, without support from politicians, bank loans, or international aid agencies. The government agency in charge of disaster management came and said they would return. One resident explained, "You know, the way that this place works is that the politicians come to support their people. They do not share with everyone." The Chairman will receive the goods and share with a very small group of people. "We have to do it ourselves," the man said.

That same day, members from the NPP arrived to the scene. Executive party representatives walked through the "construction site" speaking to victims of the fire. A young Dagomba resident who was an NPP supporter led the team around the settlement.[12] They only greeted other NPP supporters, "showing concern" to their club only. The fire outbreak did not appear to be a "public" concern, where politicians catered to a majority of marginalized slum residents. Instead, the fire shed light on the various alliances and groups within the slum, and showed that the community was extremely divided. One young man joked that the former mayor would not visit the community when he was mayor, but now he is during campaign season. The MP aspirant was impressed at the pace of reconstruction. "This will make it much more difficult to move the people," said. "It was much easier when the place was a shanty."

The group stopped for a meeting at a small covered area along the lagoon. About 50 people crowded around and the politicians sat down. They had to decide what language to speak. The candidates spoke Ga and English very well. The MP aspirant spoke in "big English"; he gave his sympathies and said how sorry he was for all that had happened. He wanted the residents to organize themselves in their groups and to write down what they needed. He said the party would help in small ways. But the Dagomba man who translated the MP aspirant's words into Twi—the language the aspirant used to address the group—was not good at Twi. When the aspirant told them to organize in groups, the young man told people to organize in their ethnic groups, making it seem as though the NPP was "tribalizing politics." But this was simply a mistake. One of the NPP representatives had to correct him to make sure that they did not think

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[12] The Dagomba people are an ethnic group whose ancestral homeland is Northern Ghana.

they were supposed to organize tribally. But this is a problem the party often has: they are often perceived as bringing tribalism back into politics. In reality, this was lost in translation.

The event also sparked a change in the way the MP aspirant viewed the community. Before the fire outbreak, he had never visited the slum. But the fire outbreak "compelled" him to go. He noticed that the problem was only getting worse because people were rebuilding with concrete structures. While he walked around the scene, he talked to his colleague. She mentioned that she had traveled to Thailand and saw how they were upgrading slums. They were doing it in the place of the slum itself—*in situ* slum upgrading. From that point forward, the candidate started incorporating the idea of *in situ* slum upgrading into his proposed policies. His policy toward slums changed spontaneously, after he walked through the neighborhood.

Community leaders also used the fire for their own self-interest. For example, one leader wrote a blog post about the "tragedy." He received 98 views on his webpage, mostly from the UK and Iceland. These links were mostly from a University College of London blog post and an Amnesty International link on an AI representative's page. In particular, the leader wanted a "donate now" link to his website so he could collect money and then distribute it to the people. He did not want the money to go through other organizations. He knew that if the money went through other organizations it would not reach all the people, and definitely not himself. He also knew that raising money could bolster his status and prestige in the community. He wanted to strengthen his reputation as a good, strong, capable leader who "shows concern."

A few days after the fire, a student from the UK wrote a blog post entitled, "Solidarity with the people of Old Fadama, Accra-Ghana:"

> We are writing on behalf of the MSc ESD study group recently back from 3 weeks…in Old Fadama. Today we received bad news from the community saying that last Monday a fire ravaged 1,000 houses rendering over 3,500 people homeless. Moreover, these people who already have almost no belongings are now left with nothing and with no place to stay. To make matters worse, the rainy season is just now starting…Thankfully, the community is well-organised and NGOs and organisations like People's Dialogue for Human Settlements, OFADA (Old Fadama Development Association) and the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor are working hard to help the Old Fadama community…We are considering…collecting funds to help with the rebuilding efforts.

The post demonstrates how NGOs like the People's Dialogue for Human Settlements (PD) make links with international funders to attract resources. But these supplies only support a small number of residents in the community and do not represent the community as a whole. The letter attributes the organization in the community to the NGOs, but grassroots political organization extends far beyond PD. In fact, the organizations attributed in the post have very little support and legitimacy at the grassroots—many residents do not trust them at all. Instead, the rebuilding process was largely spontaneous and built on informal networks of power, not through the channels of the NGOs.

After just a few days, the rebuilding process was rapidly progressing. A resident confirmed that the government had not done anything, but that "somebody from the North" donated a large gift. All three major political parties visited the slum, but only one brought mosquito nets. A local chief appealed to outsiders to give them things: cement, clothes, and money. He claimed that his family was sleeping outside. They continued to paint themselves as passive victims. "We have nothing," he said. The chief knew that this was the best way to appeal for help: appear poor; appear hopeless.

As the fire outbreak demonstrates, the distribution of aid and assistance is central to building trust and ensuring political accountability in Ghanaian informal settlements. But in this case, leaders empowered "their own" families and "clubs" at the expense of the needs of the public. Despite these patronage networks, the rebuilding occurred spontaneously, unplanned, and informally. After five weeks, the area was almost entirely rebuilt. People had moved in, roofs were completed, and the only thing left on most of the houses were the final painting jobs and the windows. Some of the houses were already painted: they were adorned with bright paint. One house had the name of a popular football club painted across the front. Most residents did not receive anything from politicians, as they promised. A woman said that the chiefs "only share among themselves." The majority tribe dominated the sharing of goods from the government. For example, one politician gave a few bags of used clothes for the fire victims. The political representative in the slum then brought the bags and dropped it near his house. It was entirely word of mouth and first-come-first-serve. No members of the minority ethnic groups were notified of the distribution of the clothes. Meanwhile, the representative wore trendy jeans and cowboy boots made from flashy leather.

This case study shows how rules and norms about property and tenure security changed. While there was an exogenous shock to the status quo—a fire outbreak—decisions to change the guidelines about building permanent structures happened spontaneously, in the "hidden transcript." Natural, organic slum upgrading was at work, without the support of outside donors and politicians. In fact, outside donors and politicians only got in the way, fueling distrust and resentment. Moreover, the episode demonstrates how individuals shape institutional change by combining the resources available to them in daily life. The fire outbreak re-shaped people's daily existence: people upgraded their homes so that they would no longer be afraid of fire outbreaks, while young men built permanent homes, providing them a new sense of ownership. In the process of reconstruction, this upgrading signaled to the authorities that they were there to stay: the slum might be extralegal, but it was no longer temporary.

The case also demonstrates how politicians' opinions and strategies changed in real time. There are various reasons politicians change opinions, and these can often be recorded by using interviews. But the politics of daily life exposes the moment in real-time, in this case when the candidate saw the permanent structure and then had a discussion with his colleague. This strategy uncovers what events motivate politicians to change their minds, which might have serious consequences for ordinary people in the future.

Conclusion

I have argued that the politics of daily life are necessary to understand important political activity. Studies of elections, multi-party democracy, political mobilization, property rights, and institutional change all require an analysis of daily activity. Methodologically, a norm of consistency is important. Positional consistency allows the researcher to analyze daily life from consistent vantage points: the "politics of sight" are unchanging (Pachirat 2011). I observed similar data across field sites: information about political behavior, community organization, and institutions by asking parallel questions and observing similar phenomena. The sustained research is essential to uncover daily routines, spontaneous shocks, linkages between diverse actors that happen in the quotidian, and institutional persistence. By documenting the observable implications of social practices, power, institutions, emotions, and real time, the politics of daily life provides novel insights into important political science concepts.

Theoretically, the paper argues that daily power struggles between elites and ordinary people, as well as informal and formal political actors (which cannot always be easily divided), contribute to institutional persistence and change. In other words, the politics of daily life demonstrates how real people experience their institutional surroundings, live through them, and even contribute to their change—or the proliferation of the status quo (Berk and Galvan 2009). Political science research requires a renewed focus on daily life. In particular, researchers should strive to examine political spaces where informal and formal networks collide. These include politicians' offices, campaign events and street organizing, and other spaces in politicians' "natural habitats" (Fenno 1982). This helps uncover the *process* of politics, of which daily life is a central part. This is particularly true for political decision-making, where leaders make decisions about policies in real time and are motivated by daily pressures.

Finally, the politics of daily life show how institutional analysis, with a particular focus on quotidian power struggles, can contribute to existing theories of the everyday. A systematic account of the process, networks, and spontaneity of daily life provides a middle ground between structural theories and agency-based approaches. This is because the practice of influencing how others act, think, and feel on a daily basis is often inextricably linked to institutional rules and government policies. Yet the space between these arenas is fluid, and requires systematic examination. This approach provides a real-time account of daily life that can be verified and generalized across time and space.

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